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### What Is International Women's Year

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# United States Center for International Women's Year

## WHAT IS INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR?

### 1. How the Year Started

During 1970-71, non-governmental organizations of women in several countries began suggesting that the United Nations should designate a Year for women, just as the UN had set aside Years for human rights, population, international cooperation, etc.

The formal initiative for International Women's Year was taken at the UN Commission on the Status of Women when it met in Geneva in 1972. A resolution was introduced asking that 1975 be designated by the UN as a Year to focus attention throughout the world on the status of women.

After approval by the Commission, the resolution had to make its way through the UN system, going first to the UN's Economic and Social Council for approval and finally to the UN General Assembly which gave its approval in December of 1972.

### 2) What is the UN Commission on the Status of Women?

The UN Commission on the Status of Women was established in 1946 and consists of 32 countries elected by the United Nations Economic and Social Council. Countries are elected for four year terms and may be re-elected. The Commission used to meet annually, but as budgetary problems plagued the UN, the Commission's schedule was changed to meeting every other year. Within the UN system, the Commission reports to the Economic and Social Council.

The United States is a member of the Commission where its representative is Pat Hutar of Chicago. She has had extensive experience in working with non-governmental organizations prior to her appointment to the Commission in January of 1974. Countries represented on the Commission are:

ARGENTINA	FINLAND	NICARAGUA
BELGIUM	FRANCE	NIGERIA
CANADA	GREECE	NORWAY
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC	GUINEA	PHILIPPINES
CHILE	HUNGARY	ROMANIA
CHINA	INDIA	THAILAND
COLOMBIA	INDONESIA	UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS
COSTA RICA	JAPAN	UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	KENYA	AND NORTHERN IRELAND
EGYPT	LIBERIA	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BYELORUSSIA	MADAGASCAR	ZAIRE

The Commission has been instrumental in directing attention to issues affecting women, and in drafting declarations and international agreements covering many of them. One achievement of the Commission was the drafting of the Declaration on the Elimination  
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of Discrimination against Women of 1967 which serves as a sort of world guide for the advancement of the rights and responsibilities of women.

3) Why was the IWY proposed?

The Commission decided to ask for International Women's Year because it felt that such a step would mobilize action on behalf of women throughout the world.

The priorities given to issues affecting women differed among the countries represented on the Commission. For developing countries, there was emphasis on the needs of rural women for such things as a water supply in the home, clinics within walking distance, and the availability of elementary schools. For women from developed countries, there was concern over obtaining access to policy-making positions, equal pay for work of equal value, etc. But whatever the differences in priorities, the women on the Commission found that they shared many common concerns, and that in particular they were united in feeling that they were at a disadvantage as compared with the status enjoyed by men. In most countries, constitutions or basic laws granted equal rights to men and women, but various barriers--customs or indifference or fear of competition or official attitudes or other causes--effectively barred women from enjoying to the full the rights legally granted. It was for this reason that a need was felt for a special Year to focus attention throughout the world on the situation of women and the means of improving their status.

4) What are the specific objectives of IWY?

The UN Resolution designating 1975 as IWY lists 3 main objectives:

- a) To promote equality between men and women;
- b) to ensure the full participation of women in all aspects of national and international life (the UN calls it "integration in development");
- c) to recognize the contributions of women to the promotion of friendly relations and cooperation among nations and to world peace.

The Commission, at its recent meeting in New York in January 1974, suggested that these objectives might be stated briefly as: equality, development, peace.

5) The UN's proposed program of activities for IWY

The Commission asked the UN Secretary General (Mr. Waldheim) to prepare a draft program of activities as a guide for governments, international agencies, and private organizations in their work for IWY. As revised and approved by the Commission, the program consists of a listing of matters which might helpfully be undertaken during IWY, at the national and international levels. It is intended that governments would select from among items listed, those which are best adapted to the particular needs of the women in individual countries. This document should be useful to non-governmental organizations and other groups concerned with IWY, and it is available upon request.

6) The International Conference for IWY to be sponsored by the UN

There is to be a UN-sponsored International Conference for IWY to be held in Mexico City. Acting on the initiative of the United States and nine developing countries, the UN Commission on the Status of Women, when it met in January 1974, asked the UN to sponsor an International Conference for IWY during 1975.



In May 1974 this recommendation was approved by the United Nations Economic and Social Council and the Conference will be held in Mexico City, Mexico from June 23 to July 4, 1975.

The Conference will be guided by the main themes of IWY--Equality, Development, Peace--and will also review the progress made so far in advancing women's rights and responsibilities and make suggestions for future steps.

7) How should the Year be observed?

There has been wide agreement on several points about observance of the Year:

- a) The Year should involve a stock-taking to determine the progress made on the rights and responsibilities of women--and on steps which still need to be taken.
- b) The Year should not, however, be merely a time of review or commemoration. It should be--most important--a staging time for new programs and ideas which would be set in motion and would carry on well beyond 1975.
- c) The Year should involve not only women, but men as well. If real progress is to be made, their help is needed. Men also have a very real stake in IWY, for IWY, through aiding women, will help also the family, the local community and the nation as a whole.
- d) Attention should not merely be limited to women's rights and responsibilities, narrowly defined, but should include women's important role in such matters of national interest as health, education, agriculture, nutrition, transportation, consumer issues, the energy crisis, housing, etc.
- e) Early advance planning is essential, by organizations and groups as well as by governments, if the Year is to bring the benefits of which it is capable for the women of the world.

8) Presidential Proclamation for International Women's Year 1975

On January 30, 1974, President Nixon proclaimed 1975 as IWY for the United States. The Proclamation refers to women's contributions to the national life, progress in removing the inequities which women face, and states "even when legal equality is achieved, however, traditional discriminatory attitudes, beliefs and practices may persist, preventing women from enjoying the full and equal rights that they deserve". The Proclamation suggests that a fitting tribute to America's women would be to complete the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution by 1975. The President calls upon the Congress, interested groups and organizations, officials of the Federal Government, and of State and local governments, educational institutions, and all others who can be of help to begin work now to provide for the observance of the Year with practical and constructive measures for the advancement of women, and also to cooperate with the activities to be arranged by the United Nations.

9) What is the U.S. Center for IWY

The US Center for IWY is non-political, non-partisan. It is a Center for distribution of information about IWY and correlation of efforts by Governmental and non-governmental groups in the US in observance of IWY. The Center was created in September, 1973,



by a grant from the Department of State to a private foundation, Meridian House International in Washington, D.C. The grant was in the nature of seed money and the Center must obtain additional funds from other sources to meet its goals. Contributions, small or large, to help sustain the Center's work, would be warmly welcomed and used constructively. If made out to Meridian House International, and earmarked for the US Center for IWY, contributions are tax deductible.

As it seeks to serve as a clearinghouse of information, the Center would appreciate receiving word of activities undertaken for IWY by organizations or groups or local communities. The Center will also send information, including UN documents as they become available, to organizations or groups which ask to be on our mailing list. The address is: U.S. Center for IWY 1975, 1630 Crescent Place, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009. We at the Center will be glad to work with you to help make the most of the opportunity which IWY 1975 offers to all of us.